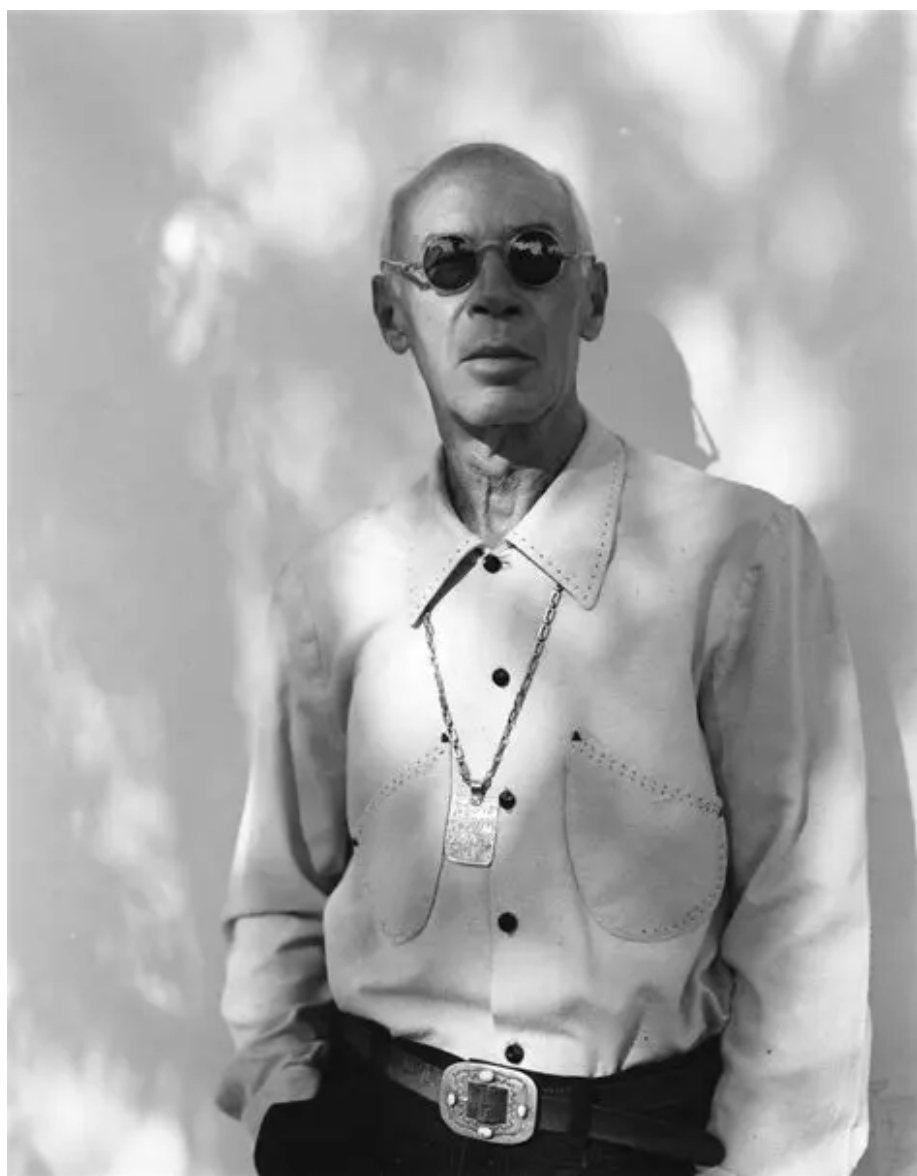


Karl Orend

Reveries of a Solitary Old Man & His Angels

Henry Miller's Unknown French Book & His Encounter
with The Magician, Joseph Delteil

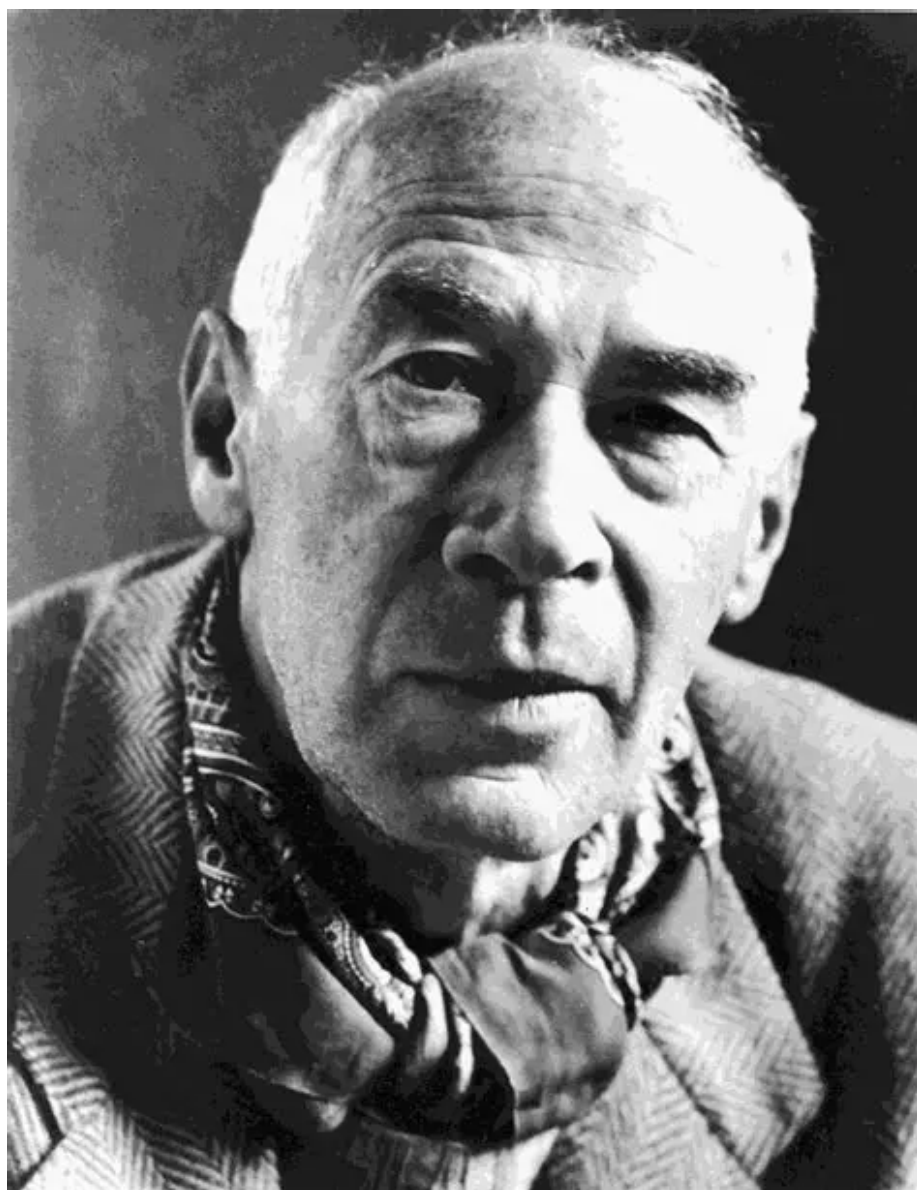




Alyscamps Press, Paris

Karl Orend, Publisher

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Henry Miller's Unknown French Book & His Encounter with
The Magician, Joseph Delteil
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This book is dedicated to Rio, Régise, & Cookie - mes amours.

This book is intended to make accessible to English speaking readers two important sources on Henry Miller that are only available in French. One of them Miller forbade to appear in English, and the other may never be translated.

Published in Paris on December first 2023 in a limited edition of 20 copies.

Introduction

Henry Miller first heard French spoken as a boy. Among his friends and acquaintances there were those who knew the language well. He wrote of the refinement of his childhood encounter with Claude de Lorraine and, later, his admiration for Élie Faure, whose translator, Walter Pach, was a client at his father's tailor shop. Henry mentioned getting his first STD from a whore at a French brothel in Manhattan as a teen. Miller gave the impression that it was Emil Schnellock who whetted his appetite to see France. Unpublished letters between Miller and his first wife Beatrice Wickens suggest that it was

Bill Dewar who regaled Henry with first-hand accounts of life among the Parisian literary and artistic community five years earlier, in 1916. Enthused by his stories, Miller rushed out to see the new silent movie, *La Vie de Bohème*, starring Alice Brady. The experience left him flooded with ideas and words to put down on paper. It provides the first recorded example of his possession by The Voice, which he wrote about so eloquently in *Big Sur & the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*.

In late April 1928, filled with ideas of going to France, as the writing of *This Gentle World* (*Moloch*) ended (for now), Henry and June took a vacation in Quebec, to experience a French-speaking world. They stayed at the Hotel Château Champlain, Quebec City, after quickly growing tired of Montréal. Despite the French spoken around them, the city had

many Anglophone reminders. It was very different, June claimed, from France itself – it certainly lacked a European feel. They were bored. They took tourist rides in a horse drawn buggy, covered in furs to keep out the cold. They saw movies and vaudeville, played chess, and went to mass. At this point, the Millers planned to sail for Europe in the fall. Henry was reading Emil Ludwig's *Napoléon*. The vacation was not a great success. They soon returned to Brooklyn. Henry tried to learn some French from a Berlitz guide his father had been given. He spent time practicing French phrases with Heinrich.

Henry and June sailed for France in July 1928, with a lump sum in cash and traveler's checks. They left savings behind in New York. Earlier biographers have believed that they sailed in the spring. Miller gave this impression in

Nexus II. He changed the atmosphere for symbolic reasons — spring as a time of new birth. They arrived in summer and stayed in France only some three to four months, as opposed to the nine to twelve months Miller claimed in his writing. They sailed direct to Le Havre on the S.S. Isle de France — a luxurious ship of the French line. Their anticipation was constantly fuelled by the praise heaped on France by their friendly purser. The Millers arrived the third week of July. For Henry it was a dream come true. He was full of anticipation, yet exhausted, fragile, and debilitated by the emotional toil of the previous year. He had seen his wife abandon him to travel to France with Jean Kronski, then return with a rich lover in tow. Miller had outlined a novel sequence about their life together, and then seen June force him to write, instead, a book based on some of the

unhappiest times of his life, the Western Union years of his marriage to Beatrice Wickens — all in under a year.

Henry and June arrived at Le Havre after seven days at sea. They had money in their pockets and even a famous local contact, Ossip Zadkine, whom June had befriended the previous year, to help them settle in. June reverted, for Bohemian Paris, to the artist's garb she wore around Greenwich Village — heavy make-up, barbaric jewelry, and a huge black cape. Henry's first impression on landing in France was one of disappointment — dockyards and rail tracks like any in America. The purser, disembarking in civilian clothes, suddenly looked very ordinary. Everything seemed a bit forlorn as the train sped on to Paris. Henry was disappointed by how nondescript the countryside seemed.

Entering the city, they gazed up at Sacré Coeur, which Miller knew well from books on Utrillo and George Moore. Henry and June arrived in Paris as evening rush hour was unfolding. The Millers traversed *La Salle des pas perdus* (echoes of André Breton) at Gare St. Lazare. They took a cab, through the place Vendôme (where the Obelisk Jack Kahane, who would become Miller's first publisher, named his press after still stands), to the *Quartier Latin*. Their hotel had faded décor. It felt battle-scarred. Soon church bells began to ring for evening service at St. Germain des Près.

Henry and June sat at a small *terrasse* on the corner of rue Bonaparte, facing the Deux Magots and the church. June began a rambling discourse explaining the neighborhood, where to buy things, where to

see famous artists and what to order. Miller had his first Pernod. They took a walk along the rue de Seine and rue de Bucci. Henry was fascinated by the plethora of outdoor cafés, market stalls, art galleries and bookshops. June, whose language skills were better, had to order. Henry soon gave up on his basic French. They took a drink at the Café Flore, where she suggested sights to see, such as Sainte Chapelle and St. Sulpice — which Henry recalled from reading Huysmans. June explained people in France often met their friends at a café, rather than their meager homes. Henry liked the idea, since they had barely, during their marriage, ever known any privacy at home.

*

Miller did not begin to learn French in earnest until he arrived in Paris alone, on March 4th 1930. His French greatly improved after his stay in Dijon, at the Lycée Carnot, early 1932.¹

*

Henry Miller decided to write a book in French, in 1975, at the suggestion of his friend, Sylvie Crossman — who was writing a masters' thesis on his work. Mademoiselle Crossman, student of the *École Normale Supérieure*, was a regular at 444 Ocampo Drive, in Pacific Palisades during the last years of Henry's life. She lived in Los Angeles from 1974-1981, where she taught at UCLA. In

¹ Henry Miller *Letter from Dijon*. Edited, with context and an Afterword by Karl Orend. Jackson Publishing 2005.

1978, she became California correspondent of *Le Monde*. Crossman later became *Le Monde* correspondent for Australia. She became a respected writer in France, as well as a leading expert on aboriginal societies — a publisher and the author of around twenty books, including novels, biography, exhibition catalogues and literary essays.

Sylvie Crossman wrote of their first encounter:

“I remember the old Henry Miller, at 444 Ocampo Drive, Pacific Palisades, an air-conditioned suburb of Los Angeles, just before Malibu, and the sound of the nascent waves of the Pacific Ocean. I was 20, *normalienne*. I used the pretext of a thesis to meet the author of the *Tropics*.

He once wrote to me:

‘The theme of ‘civilization’ (or rather annihilation) still fascinates me.’

We used to arrange the hour and day of my visits by telephone. Invariably, I would find a square of white paper pinned to the door, with a message from Connie, his secretary. ‘Sylvie, come in. Henry’s asleep, go wake him up!’ It was always in the afternoon. I can still feel the pulse of that huge empty house and, in the obscurity, as if seeking me out, his muffled grunts as he slept, from the shadows of his darkened bedroom. I went in. Wrapped in his bathrobe of blue flannel, Henry slept. Or was he just pretending? I still don’t know. I always put off the moment when I would adjust his hearing aid — another intimacy we shared — to wake him, so he could begin his

‘dictée,’ as he liked to call it. He seemed to be at work even as he rested. Then, finally, I went ahead with the ritual. I put the earpiece in place. Suddenly, his eyes cracked open, the fleshy lips parted.

Stirring, he said:

‘We’re getting behind today, with my muddled brain, my blinkered imagination. Amongst it all, there are the daily miracles we don’t even notice. We ought to be obliterated... allow ourselves to be dominated by an ‘inferior’ people, who we have, till now, treated as pariahs.’”²

² Sylvie Crossman *Apprendre à colorer nos imaginations* in *Le Monde des livres* 31/1/08. For another account of Miller’s last years see *444Ocampo Drive* by Pascal Vrebos, Edited with essays and notes by Karl Orend Jackson Publishing, Ann Arbor 2003.

The theme of civilization versus indigenous societies was one dear to Crossman. She had grown up among the Polynesian Islanders, at Raiatea, where her parents were teachers.

Je ne suis pas plus con qu'un autre (hereafter *Je ne suis*), arguably Henry Miller's least known book, was begun, at Crossman's suggestion, just hours after one of her visits. They agreed that he should write a book in French. He wanted to leave in all his faults of grammar, punctuation, and style. Henry, by this time semi-infirm, blind in one eye, and partially deaf, hoped that readers would expect nothing brilliant, especially in French. His only goal was "to make them smile from time to time." Miller demanded that the text never be translated into English — which explains why almost none of his American readers have ever heard of it. Why he did so is unclear.

There is nothing in the book that could justify the decision. The reason is probably that the base text is spontaneously written and hardly revised. It is conversational in style and poor in grammar. Henry was afraid of how the translation would be made. There were also ideas expressed (such as his comments on Knut Hamsun) that could have caused controversy in America but were unlikely to in France. It could come across as inferior writing. This is the last thing Miller wanted in these years when he was canvassing avidly for the Nobel Prize and fending off what he perceived as hostile biographers (Jay Martin & Brassai). The French first editions appeared in 1976 from publishers Buchet Chastel. A facsimile edition of Miller's handwritten manuscript appeared in 1980.

In style, *Je ne suis* most closely resembles the posthumous volume *Reflections*, not the more literary essays of *The Book of Friends*. Unknown to Anglophone readers for nearly fifty years, but a familiar text to French readers, this small book is most revealing of Miller's connections to French literature and eastern religion.

**

Henry Miller often alludes, in *Je ne suis pas plus con qu'un autre* to things that are familiar to French readers, but much less so to Americans. He begins by saying that even though he is not played out (*ausgespielt*), he feels that he has reached a point in his life that resembles the characters in Flaubert's picaresque novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881).

The two characters, after whom the book is named, both copy-clerks, who perhaps might remind readers, at times, of Miller and Alfred Perlès during their *Paris Herald Tribune* days, go through a series of adventures, intellectual and philosophical explorations — all of which come to grief. Local villagers think they are insane. They try to have them committed. The book deals with the dichotomy between intellectualism and ideas and real life. It highlights the dangers of living a life directed by the mind, book learning and ambition.

Flaubert's description of this book, which he considered his major work, and which Ezra Pound saw as a precursor to Joyce's *Ulysses*, recalls Miller's opening pages of *Tropic of Cancer*.

Flaubert wrote:

"I am planning a thing in which I give vent to my anger... I shall vomit over my contemporaries the disgust they inspire in me... It will be big and violent."³

Similar sentiments appeared from Miller, soon after *Je ne suis*, in his contribution to *Four Visions of America* (1977). Stanke Publishers reissued a facsimile edition of the holograph manuscript of *Je ne suis*, in Canada, in 1980.

Henry Miller wrote of Sylvie Crossman as a fine conversationalist. By the time she departed, her conversation left him in a state

³ The best modern version is the translation by Mark Polizzotti, published by Dalkey Archive.

of emotional vertigo. He lamented he could not find American women with whom he could have such discussions. Miller found Americans afflicted by a form of *mutisme*, compared to the French. He recalled a 1930 influence, Marcel Proust's friend Paul Morand, as saying that one could always recognize an American by the way their conversation was dominated by the word "I."⁴ The French are much more discrete, reserved, and modest, Miller affirmed. Americans often claim that the French dominate conversation, but this is only because they are great thinkers and *raconteurs*. Miller said he would sooner listen to a great dialogue between two cultured French people than to a Mozart sonata.

⁴ In 1930 Miller decided to write a book on Paris, in imitation of Morand's *New York*. This led to several essays and, indirectly, to *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller applied, unsuccessfully, for a job as Morand's secretary in 1931. Morand later became a great admirer of Miller's books.

Miller's train of thought switched to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Henry, who once written that people said he could have been another Mozart, when listening to him play piano as a child, wrote that the composer pissed him off. He cannot forgive Mozart's perfection. Henry was in love with imperfection. He denounced Mozart, Leonardo da Vinci, Flaubert, Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot, and the great French thinkers of the eighteenth century. Henry loves "monsters of imperfection" and rebellion — including Rabelais, Rimbaud and Cendrars. Hemingway means nothing to him.⁵ Even Bach could bore him.⁶ Miller loved those writers and individuals who are slightly crazy — not imbeciles, but rather idiots! — in the sense of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. He would rather see "simple folk" in charge of government than the "rats" he saw there in

⁵ Hemingway played a large part in Miller's desire to first relocate to Paris.

⁶ Michael Fraenkel's favorite composer.

his day. He imagines a government led by Louis Armstrong (see *Colossus of Maroussi*), Charley Chaplin and Picasso (both of whom appear in Twinka Thebaud's *Reflections* Capra 1984).

Miller says that the world, of 1975, is not yet fucked — it's only almost fucked. He foresaw worse than Hitler and the current bugbear, Nixon, on the horizon. A time of monsters and megalomaniacs would soon be upon us. They are the inevitable result of our own behavior. They are our progeny. Henry identified a deterioration of the sense of cruelty in mankind. It had, however, not yet reached the level of Antonin Artaud's *Théâtre de la cruauté*.⁷

⁷ An important influence on Miller in 1933. Artaud, briefly close to Anaïs Nin, occupied Miller's studio at the villa Seurat before he moved in.

Miller wrote that he had never had any truck with politics. He chose to ignore the implicitly political stance of his writings — his involvement with anarchism and socialism as a young man. He believed that it was impossible for a politician to not be corrupt. They are all cheats, liars, and criminals. He places religions squarely alongside them. Organized religion is mind destroying. Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed changed nothing in the heart of Man. Good and evil still coexist. This was a basic tenet of Zoroaster,⁸ which our society can never accept.

Religion had become, by 1975, big business. He saw this in the churches of Billy Graham and Katherine Kuhlman. Miller saw these kinds of people everywhere in American

⁸ Interest of Miller, ever since he read Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

society, like rats or maggots. He might have recalled his disgust at a visit to Lourdes, during his Paris years.

What are missing in the world, Miller wrote, are angels.⁹ There is no place for them on earth. Would we even recognize them if we saw them? Perhaps angels are all about us, without us realizing it, he wrote, echoing W. B. Yeats.

We can more easily recognize the devils in our midst. They are manifold. Sadly, they are often more interesting than the virtuous and the hypocrites. Henry clarified that he was speaking of ordinary “devils,” not the horrific extremity of a Hitler or Gilles de Rais.

Recalling his arrival in France, in March 1930, Miller wrote that at the time he only knew

⁹ See Karl Orend Henry Miller’s *Angelic Clown* Alyscamps Press 2005.

three or four words of French. He never studied French at school. He elected to take four years of High School German instead. His family were German speaking, and he knew the language before he knew English. Henry, after 1930, learnt French quickly and of necessity, in the streets, the bars and cafés and by watching French films. Everything was a new discovery. He recalled Parisian children mocking his mistakes when he tried to speak to them. He confused verbs such as “terminer” and “finir.” He said “malade” instead of “souffrant.” Alfred Perlès remembered the rapid improvement of Miller’s French, following his stay in Dijon.¹⁰ In 1932, Anaïs Nin found Miller a French teacher (whom she paid), Monsieur Lanthelme — who could not speak a word of English. Henry had already begun to read in

¹⁰ Henry Miller *Letter from Dijon* Edited with context and analysis by Karl Orend Jackson Publishing 2005.

French. He often read with a dictionary at *Café de la Liberté*, near the Hotel Central, in Montparnasse. His first French book in Paris was Cendrars' *Moravagine*. Later, Cendrars would be the first major author to acclaim Miller upon the publication of *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller also read Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, in 1933. Throughout the 1930s Miller read French by preference and almost exclusively. Although it was more symbolic than factual, he once claimed he had read less than a dozen books in English between 1932 and 1939.

Monsieur Lanthelme admonished Henry for reading the newly discovered Louis-Ferdinand Céline before he had thoroughly read Voltaire or Balzac. Through these experiences of reading French with a dictionary, Miller learned that the essential was not to

understand every word an author wrote, but rather to be able to capture the spirit of his writing. When Miller reread Céline in English, he was disappointed. Henry considered his books untranslatable. He tried to share his enthusiasm for Céline with his French teacher, to no avail. *Tropic of Cancer* existed only in draft at this point, or else Lanthelme would have seen a similarity between Céline and his, yet unknown, pupil.

Henry Miller could, by 1975, no longer recall Monsieur Lanthelme's favorite authors. He guessed they included the established classics, such as Flaubert, Racine, Balzac, and de Maupassant. They never discussed the Russian literature that Henry so admired — Andreyev, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Gorky, and Tolstoy. Lanthelme's attitude was why should he look abroad when his own country's

literature was so rich? He would rather talk about the classics or Greek drama than the Russians.

The second book Miller read in French, also at *Café de la Liberté*, was much easier than reading Cendrars — Paul Morand's *New York*. Miller had already read Morand's translated books, in Brooklyn. He was a bestseller in both French and English, as well as an editor at *The Dial*, which Miller read avidly. Henry recalled (incorrectly) that he wrote to Morand, in a moment of desperation, asking for a job during his first year in Paris and never received a reply. Morand did reply to Miller. He was encouraging, even though he could not afford to hire him. Then, twenty-five or thirty years later, Morand invited Miller to dine with him close to the Pont du Gard, near Avignon (1953). He told Miller how much he

admired his books. Henry seemed (unreasonably) upset that Morand made no mention of his job request.

Monsieur Lanthelme was well informed about Latin and Greek literature. Henry recalled that he often spoke of Terence and Tertullian, about whom Henry knew little. Miller wrote that he detested the classical authors and heroes he was forced to study at school, such as Virgil, Cicero, and Caesar. The only thing he remembered of Virgil was “rari nantes in gurgite vasto” (a few swimming in the vast deep) and “timeo danaos et dona ferentes.” (I fear the Greeks, even when they bear gifts) — which he had alluded to in *Black Spring* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*.

Henry said that much more important in shaping his hostile view of classical learning

than Latin itself was his instructor, Bulldog Holmes. Miller claimed Holmes belonged in an asylum. He always dressed like an English gentleman. He wore a bowler hat and sported a monocle. Holmes was frequently angry. When he became enraged with his pupils, his lips trembled, and the veins stood out on his temples. At such times, he seemed a monster. A moment later he could be smiling and kind. He would stand upright and bark out the Latin conjugations: *hic, haec, hoc, huius* etc. He made his pupils recite them out loud.

Miller spoke of Jerry Brown, recently elected Governor of California (succeeding Ronald Reagan) who, Henry claimed, carried a copy of Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* with him every time he took a plane. Miller had never read the book. He doubted he ever would. Henry wondered why books like

Imitation of Rimbaud

Imitation of Céline

Imitation of Apollinaire

Imitation of Gérard de Nerval

Imitation of Jean Giono

had never been written.

This led him to think of Edouard Herriot, who had been a great connoisseur of music.¹¹ He claimed it was rare to find men of great culture among politicians. But he then recalled that the monster Adolf Hitler had been a fervent admirer of Richard Wagner.

Miller turned to the nineteenth century, and the “Zoroastrian” figure of William Blake,

¹¹ Herriot 1872-1957 French *Président du Conseil* (on 3 occasions).

See: Leon Trotsky “Edouard Herriot Politician of the Golden Mean”
Fourth International, New York December 1941, pp.301-306.

who sat smiling, happy even, on his deathbed. In the middle of the 19th century, he imagined a small man, named Max Stirner, surrounded by copies of his work, *The Ego & His Own*.¹²

Henry wondered at the vast array of great creators in the 19th century — including over a hundred writers who are internationally known. He had begun to make a list of the major writers, composers, and painters of the time, which he considered appending to his book. Miller had read many of the great writers of history. He asked himself if they had really enriched him. Perhaps he recalled June Mansfield's complaint that the only way he learnt anything was through books — that he was incapable of learning from life. Miller concluded that his contact with these giants of literary and artistic life had “almost

¹² For the importance of this work to Miller see Karl Orend *The Brotherhood of Fools & Simpletons: Gods and Devils in Henry Miller's Utopia* Alyscamps Press 2005.

annihilated me before I could begin my writing career.” He was speaking of those figures whose style and content seemed to express what he himself would have wished to write if he had been able. They were those he would have loved to emulate — Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Élie Faure, Spengler, Hamsun etc.

Miller wrote:

“I could never find my own voice because of them.”

In his memory, during the 1920s, Miller lived the life of characters from his favorite fictions — works by Knut Hamsun, Dostoevsky, and Thomas Mann. From old age, Miller looked back on Dostoevsky as some kind of moon

orbiting round the beneficent planet Jupiter.¹³ Victor Hugo, another favorite, appeared more like a sun, a colossus. Arthur Rimbaud (with whom Miller clearly identified, see *Time of the Assassins*) was a supernova. Rimbaud invented a new language. He wrote a form of poetry unlike any that preceded it. It was impossible to avoid his influence, even for the man of the streets. Miller saw him as a demi-god placed on earth to instruct and enlighten us.

Henry wrote that the person who did not know the works of Friedrich Nietzsche has lived in vain. Nietzsche was a “sacred iconoclast,” a “Christ in disguise” who, along with Dostoevsky, dominated the 19th century. It seemed impossible to Miller that the same century could have given us Nietzsche and

¹³ See Karl Orend *Henry Miller's Red Phoenix* Alyscamps Press 2006 and Maria Bloshteyn *The Making of a Counter-Culture Icon: Henry Miller's Dostoevsky* Toronto U. P. 2007.

Gurdjieff¹⁴ - “the great enigma, both charlatan and saint.”

Thinking about great writers, Miller wagered those lesser writers, like Jules Verne or Lewis Carroll, would be read long after the greats had faded in popularity:

“We remember those writers who gave us joy long after we have forgotten those who made us think.”

For example, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* would always touch the child in each of us. It is a “pure delight.”

The 20th century made Henry Miller’s mind reel:

¹⁴ A friend of Miller’s friend Walter Lowenfels.

“Beauty, genius, wars, horror, massacres, pogroms, revolutions, poverty and wealth, natural disasters, Antisemitism, communism, socialism, anarchism, promises of peace in our time, ridiculous religions etc.”

Naturally, none of these were exclusive to the 20th century, but this century seemed to have, more than any other — with its atom bombs, regicides, gulags, genocides, and Holocaust etc. — juxtaposed beauty and horror — It was filled with monsters and demi-gods.

Miller vaguely recalled a quote from Victor Hugo:

“Dans le 20ème siècle il n’y aura plus de guerres, la pauvreté sera abolie, les maladies

n'existeront plus et l'homme vivra en paix et harmonie !”¹⁵

There was one man Miller had not yet evoked — a writer whom he considered more important than all others in Europe or Asia — Walt Whitman. Miller wrote that Whitman was greater than Goethe, the greatest European. He was greater than all the saints and gurus of India. There is only one book for which he is universally known — *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman had enjoined us to write “new Bibles, our own Bibles.” Henry had tried to do this in his work. Miller perceived Whitman as almost Hindu. He resembled Swami Vivekananda.

By the 1970s, young Americans had become familiar with all kinds of Indian gurus. They

¹⁵ “In the 20th century there will be no more wars, poverty will be abolished, sickness will no longer exist, and mankind will live in peace and harmony.”

often traveled to India or Tibet, Nepal, and Burma. They were usually seeking one of two things — a guru or drugs. They traveled with little money. Miller saw them as desperate. They were Rimbauds without genius.

Miller believed that when the condition of the world worsened, times were more favorable for the creation of great art. It was not always so, but under the guise of modern democracy things had gone astray. There was no longer any place for the truly great, noble, or spiritual. He contrasted the apparent grandeur of skyscrapers or the Tour Eiffel with that of the Sphinx or the Great Pyramids.

Miller was reminded of the film *The Seven Samurai*. At the end, the leader of the samurai says, pointing in the direction of the peasants:

“Look. It is they, the peasants, who always emerge victorious.”

Miller interpreted this as meaning that it was the cowards who always survive. The heroes become the fallen. Miller claimed he identified with the great cowards: “I am one myself.” The heroes of ancient Greece seemed mad to him. They were not supermen, but rather unhinged, completely insane.

During his intellectual wanderings, Miller was suddenly reminded of Francis Carco and *La Nostalgie de Paris*. Miller spoke of Dickens, an author he could not admire. When he was young, someone had made him a gift of Dickens’ complete works, in a finely bound edition. In 1975, thinking of those books sent a shiver down Miller’s spine. He did not know why, but reading Dickens left him feeling

depressed and morbid. It was largely because of Dickens that Miller came to detest English literature. He made an exception for Lewis Carroll — both a bizarre individual and unique writer. Usually, people did not understand when Miller said that reading French literature in the original had left him both wiser and spoiled.

Miller listed a series of French words and expressions that had always fascinated him. They ranged, in meaning, from bulimia, pimp and slut to son of a bitch, illiterate and modest. There were also places in Paris that still captured his imagination. These included: passage Jouffroy, rue du Départ, Gare D'Austerlitz, place des Voges, place Furstemberg, place de l'Estrapade, place

Violet, rue de la Tombe Issoire, impasse de Rouet, rue du Commerce and place d'Alésia.¹⁶ Miller loved walking the streets. He always noticed the unusual names of hotels. The first French hotel he stayed in (1928) was Grand Hotel de France, on the rue Bonaparte. He still remembered one day, in broken French, asking the owner if he could lend her money, rather than borrow some money, as he intended. It was a pity, Henry said, that back in the 1930s Adrienne's *Le Gimmick* did not exist.¹⁷ Nothing was more pathetic than to see

¹⁶ Passage Jouffroy, rue du Départ, Gare D'Austerlitz (Tropic of Cancer), place des Voges (Bertha Schrank), place Furstemberg (June/ Tropic of Cancer), place de l'Estrapade, place Violet, rue de la Tombe Issoire (adjacent to villa Seurat), impasse de Rouet (home of Hans Reichel & Perlès), rue du Commerce and place d'Alésia (café Zeyer/Hamlet Correspondence/meetings with Durrell).

¹⁷ The *Le Gimmick* series of books, the first of which was published by Flammarion, in 1971, sought to teach foreigners colloquial spoken French as heard in the streets. *Le Gimmick: Français parlé* by Adrienne, reviewed by Anthony S. Caprio, *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (March 1978).

an educated man making basic errors in a foreign language. Struggling in vain to express himself, the cultivated man could appear more ridiculous than someone with no education at all.

Miller invoked his favorite buildings and neighborhoods in Paris, notably the 13th Arrondissement. Nothing was beautiful there, but everything was interesting. He had always felt the desire to lose himself in the crowd and the life of the streets.

Henry recalled the pleasure it had given him to stop and have a drink at a café or brasserie. Often, when crossing the city by bus, he would get off at an unknown place, anxious to get to know a new corner of the Paris. His “thirst” for the city was such that, at times, he wandered the streets “drunk” on life.

Everything seemed to add to his enthusiasm and appetite for experience.

Miller regretted not reading certain French authors, such as Corneille. He regretted not trying harder to eradicate his American accent when he spoke French — and skipping over certain words he read, rather than looking them up in the dictionary. He also wished he had read closely Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris*. Looking back, Henry saw much he would have done differently.

Thinking back to his childhood, Miller remembered that he had always loved humorous books. His first favorite was *Peck's Bad Boy*,¹⁸ which he thought of as a book for

¹⁸ George W. Peck created this character in a series of books. Then 'hero,' called Henry, was a huge favorite of Miller's generation. The popular appeal

dunces. He only had to begin reading it to start laughing out loud. Miller claimed that in comparison Mark Twain seemed dry. Otto Rank, in Paris, had told Miller that he loved Twain — whom he considered a major author. Miller told Rank he preferred Gogol.¹⁹ Miller wondered if there was an affinity between Twain and Courteline²⁰ or between Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. This reminded him of a story from his days working in his father's tailor shop. One day, Heinrich Miller, already slightly drunk, met a young man at the bar of the Wolcott Hotel, across the street. He persuaded him to buy a waistcoat with pearl buttons — a choice Henry found unusual. Two years later, still not

led to both stage adaptations and a film, in 1921. Project Gutenberg provides free downloads of three titles in the series.

¹⁹ Major influence on *Moloch* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*.

²⁰ Georges Courteline (1858-1928), Légion d'honneur/ Académie Goncourt, was a satirical novelist and playwright.

having received payment for the waistcoat, Heinrich asked that his client pay him something on account, no matter how small. One day, while his father was out, Henry was surprised to see the man arrive with a book under his arm. It was Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. He offered the volume, which was a rare edition, to Henry, as part payment. He never showed the book to his father, who never read books anyway, only newspapers. Miller intended to read Flaubert's book, but never got round to it. Now, in his old age, he thought it would be good idea to make a film of the tale starring Alec Guinness as Buvard and Peter Falk as Pécuchet. Miller wanted to strongly recommend *Flaubert*, by Maurice Nadeau, to all his readers.²¹

²¹ In English: Maurice Nadeau *The Greatness of Flaubert* Alcove Press, London 1972. Nadeau was an old friend and publisher of Miller, who defended him during Le cas Miller trials of he 1950s.

At the end of *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky wrote:

“Hurrah for the Karamazovs.”

Miller echoed the sentiment.

Henry thought of Knut Hamsun, who, he had been told, was a Nazi collaborator. Henry did not believe the allegation.²² He thought rather that Hamsun was simply showing his disgust with his fellow Norwegians. Henry felt revolted by many of his fellow Americans. He regretted trying to emulate Dostoevsky during the 1920s. No one could possibly copy his style. If Hamsun was a master stylist, then Dostoevsky was a magician. It was the same order of difference as between Ambrose Bierce and Voltaire.

²² Hamsun was indeed a Nazi supporter. He raved about Hitler and gifted his Nobel Prize Medal to Goering.

Miller wrote that Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart bored him. Goethe, he said he thought of as an old fool.²³ He found Socrates lacking in intelligence and intuition. Henry had no time for martyrs, which is why he valued St. Francis of Assisi more than Christ. It was in a book by his old friend Joseph Delteil that Henry discovered the quote by Francis of Assisi:

“Don’t try to change the world — change worlds!”

Miller wanted to add a quote attributed to the Buddha, in English, for fear of ruining it by his poor translation into French:

“I obtained not the least thing from complete, unexcelled awakening.”

²³ Not true, as Brassai’s account of Henry Miller’s Paris Years shows.

Henry had been deeply touched to see, in one of Gauguin's Polynesian paintings, a triptych, words which he thought he had first used himself:

“Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?”

These were questions to which there was no response.

Henry's mind shifted to *Monsieur Teste* by Paul Valéry.²⁴ Miller liked the text a great deal but found it hard to associate himself too closely with Valéry, whom he did not like personally. He referred to Valéry's poem *La Cimetière Marin* (“The Graveyard by the Sea,” 1920) and remarked how much had been written about it. One day, Miller visited the cemetery that was the inspiration behind the poem, with his German publisher, Leidig Rowohlt. They had

²⁴ Paul Valéry 1871-1945, famous French writer, and poet. Miller sent him a copy of *Tropic of Cancer* in 1935.

hardly entered the gates when a large dog approached Miller. It closely resembled his own dog, which he had left behind in Big Sur. The dog followed them everywhere, even as far as the grave of Paul Valéry, where Miller and Rowolht sat for a while to talk about death and reincarnation. What disturbed Miller was that when he returned to Big Sur, some months later, his own dog refused to recognize him. Miller wondered if it was because he had been absent for so long or because he had not acknowledged his own dog at the Cimetière Marin. After that, relations between Henry and his dog never recovered. Miller blamed his loss on Paul Valéry!

Some time later, Miller passed through Sète again — this time in search of a home for himself and Renate Gerhardt, whom he

intended to marry. All Henry needed was a place suitable for his children, Tony and Val, and Renate's two boys. He criss-crossed Europe in an old Fiat, with Vincent Birge. Henry was offered many good homes — even a castle at a ridiculously cheap price. He had enough money to buy anything he wanted, thanks to the success of recent editions of *Tropic of Cancer*. Yet, nothing seemed to suit him. Finally, one day in Portugal, he realized that his journey was futile. When he returned to Germany, Renate was angry with him and broke off their relationship. Henry imagined she was more furious about his yearlong trip to find a home than anything else.²⁵

During his travels Henry had been particularly taken with Locarno, in Italy. On the shores of Lake Maggiore, he felt like he had found

²⁵ During this time Miller was unable to write and deeply depressed because he was afraid of the outcome of the multiple prosecutions of *Tropic of Cancer* in America. He was fleeing rather than searching, as Brassai clearly revealed.

paradise on earth. It was so perfect that after a while he fled, because, as he often said, he was unable to bear perfection. Switzerland left him cold. There was nothing wrong with Big Sur, except that he and his wife (Eve) had separated. He had cared for Renate deeply. Much later she confessed to Henry that she had left him on the advice of an astrologer Henry knew personally.

Thinking about his travels in Europe, Henry could not miss the opportunity to write about Verona. He was enchanted by the city from the moment he entered its walls. He visited the tomb of Romeo and Juliet, which he later found odd for someone who didn't even like Shakespeare. The only play by Shakespeare that Miller had ever liked was "The Tempest." He admired it for the same reason he loved Balzac's *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert* —

because of the sense of the magical and mysterious, the supernatural and spiritual.

This reminded Henry of Frank Harris, who had been crazy about Shakespeare, as well as Oscar Wilde and Jesus. In Henry's father's tailor shop Harris had rhapsodized about these men at length. The Jewish tailors, who barely understood the allusions he was making, were transported. When Harris left, they asked Henry who the man was. "A genius," he replied. Henry still, in 1975, believed Harris to be a genius. It was he who had revealed to the world the talent of George Bernard Shaw, G.K. Chesterton, and Hilaire Belloc, to name just a few. Henry was certain Harris was exceptional as a writer and man — but to Heinrich Miller, Henry believed that he had been nothing more than an eccentric, a

bit gaga, someone who belonged, like a freak, in the circus.

When Henry Miller moved to Paris, in March 1930, Frank Harris was living on the Mediterranean coast, at Nice. Henry wrote to him. To his surprise, Harris invited Henry to come and stay if he liked. Miller thought Harris was the only author capable of making such a gesture. He was struck by the fact that Harris had seen, in him, something no-one else, not even his family and friends, had perceived — that he was destined to be a famous writer.

At this point, when Miller had published no books, but had tried to complete four, it was desperately important for him to be recognized by an established writer and editor. He had never forgotten his years of rejection,

refusal, hunger, and humiliation. Above all, he remembered the physical hunger he had suffered. It eventually became a sickness — phagomania or “bulemie” in French. This sense of failure is why Henry became overgenerous to the poor and unfortunate, and somewhat cold towards his equals. He knew what it meant to be nobody. Even in his old age, it was hard for Miller to accept that he was universally known, even if for the wrong reasons.

Miller said he never had the romantic courage of the Parisian *clochards*. He had become a worm, an insect, in pursuit of his dream. If he had become a worm, an insect, an asshole, a traitor, and a failure, how had he managed to survive? He had two answers. One was astrological. In his chart, Jupiter was well placed. The other reason was that he believed

that he had a guardian angel that protected him. Who was his guardian angel? Henry believed the opinion of a medium he had met in London, during a visit with Alfred Perlès²⁶ — that he had had a stillborn brother, who, among all those on high, worked hardest to protect him. Henry had never heard mention of this brother from his parents. He would not have expected to. Whether it was true or not did not matter, because the very notion of his existence had protected him on numerous occasions. Each time, he let Henry almost fail completely, before intervening to save him. Perhaps his brother knew that this experience was good for his character, made a man of him. Among his friends, Henry recalled that it was said that one wasn't a man until one had caught the first dose of clap (he caught it three or four times).

²⁶ Date unknown. The two men visited London together at the end of 1938, and again in the 1950s.

Henry remembered his meeting with the medium, who had told him about his unknown brother, well. Perlès had taken Henry to a part of London he had never seen before. He led him to a beautiful house, where Miller was introduced to the medium (who knew nothing about Henry) as a birthday gift. They had hardly sat down when the medium told Henry:

“You have written books which have cause real suffering to people. You should have probably been imprisoned for some of the things you have done, but you have a protector in heaven.”

He looked at the ceiling as he pronounced these words. He then told Henry about the dead brother. Miller listened to the whole

story without saying a word. When they left, Alf asked Henry his opinion of the medium. Miller replied that he was a fuckwit, an asshole. They laughed. Henry asked how Fred had met the medium, which was an incredible story.

“Do you have faith in him?” Henry asked.

“Yes, he never steered me wrong.” Fred replied.

Henry pushed further. He wanted to know what sort of questions Fred asked — if he tried to see whether he would be rich some day or what success his books would have. Fred replied that they never talked about personal or banal things, but rather about the likes of Socrates, Plotinus, and Jesus Christ. Henry thought Fred must have primed the

medium, forewarned him, but Fred swore he had not. Henry wondered if the medium knew the date of his own death, as Swedenborg had. Fred was certain he did.

Miller wrote that Fred loved these kinds of adventures. He, in turn, accused Henry of being a mystagogue. Henry thought it was Fred who was, if not a mystagogue, a *mystificateur* (hoaxer). For example, he spoke often of Madame Blavatsky, but Henry doubted Fred had ever read her books. He claimed to have discovered a medium called Mabel, to whom he attributed all sorts of powers. Henry never knew if she really existed.

Henry could never forget that the medium had asked him, abruptly:

“What have you done with your soul?”

At age eighteen, Henry and his friends had talked at length about the soul. What surprised him, from the vantage point of the mid-1970s, was that it was in New York, not California, that they had had these kinds of discussions. Even in New York, around the year 1900, the soul occupied an important place in social consciousness. There may have been no mahatmas or gurus to turn to, but there were Theosophists (like Bob Challacombe) and the Baha’i movement. Henry had explored every aspect of religion and the spiritual. He felt sure that he was an “old soul.” He would have gladly spent his last few pennies on a consultation with a medium or phrenologist. He felt that he was a failure, a good for nothing. He did not believe that

being a writer was enough to make somebody out of a “nobody.”

Even at a young age, Henry Miller had the presentiment that the cultural route was hollow, false. The advent of World War One confirmed his suspicions. It was the so-called civilized countries that organized the war, not the poor or underdeveloped nations. It was ironic that the soldiers carried into battle specially produced military editions of great books of European literature. What Henry could never forget was that among the millions of civilized men only three or four leading cultural figures refused to support the massacre.

Henry believed that even in the 1970s the French had not forgiven Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland for having been “above the

fight.” Henry could only recall, among major writers, Rolland, Henri Barbusse, and Hermann Hesse rejecting war. During World War Two, Miller’s friend Jean Giono had published his anti-war book, *Refus d’obéissance*. For all the good it had done he might as well have written another *Madame Butterfly*. Books seemed to count for almost nothing in such times. What we needed were men of action. That is why Miller had such great admiration for Alexander the Great. He would advance into countries not even knowing where he was headed. Yet, he never lost confidence in himself. There were no maps. His men grumbled and threatened rebellion. Miller could not forget a speech Alexander had made to his men.

He said:

“When we left Macedonia, I promised to lead you to the ends of the earth.”

What modern day leader could speak thus? None! Alexander was a young man at the time. Miller saw him as a kind of “military Rimbaud.” He was admirable as a general, but more so as a man. It was true he had caused the deaths of perhaps millions and left hundreds of cities in ruins, but was it worse than the medieval Christian crusades? Richard the Lion Heart was made into a hero, but Henry preferred his adversary, Saladin. It was said that after a victory Saladin always offered alms to the defeated soldiers. Henry likened this to St. Francis creating an order for atheists or composing a poem, as he lay dying, to “brother Death.”

François Villon and Rabelais had risked their lives. Goethe had not. It was said of Alexander the Great that Aristotle was his master. Miller found it hard to believe, since he saw no link between them. It was like saying that Diderot was the inspiration behind Rimbaud. But then, who would have believed that Chaim Soutine's (Miller's neighbor at 18 villa Seurat) favorite painter was Rembrandt? Rembrandt was almost a god to Soutine.

It was difficult for people to believe that Miller's master (in the sense of the sublime) was Sri Ramakrishna. When Henry spoke to people who knew him primarily as the author of *Tropic of Cancer* about spiritual and religious figures, they often looked at him open-mouthed in disbelief. Henry said to himself "keep your mouth shut, don't breathe a word." He would pretend to be ashamed to associate with spiritual men. He had made the

acquaintance of three or four swamis. All had accepted Henry unreservedly. Once, he had visited a catholic school for girls in Hollywood. The nuns instructed him in the art of silk-screen. He had been both surprised and deeply moved by their kindness. He asked them if they were aware who he was. "Of course," they had replied, "Henry Miller, the author of the Tropics!" They began to laugh. Some of the young nuns admitted to having read his books.

One sound that always sent shivers down Henry's spine was that of sobbing, heard in the silence of the night. It happened several times in Paris, but never in New York or Los Angeles, that he had heard sobbing as he passed a partly opened window after dark. At the age of eighty-two, Henry sobbed at the end of the Fellini film *Nights of Cabiria*. He

wept for twenty minutes. It had done him good. He wished he could see a film that made him weep every day. To hear sobbing in the dark of night was different. It was terrifying. One always heard it in the poorer neighborhoods. It was a sound to inspire poets and writers, perhaps musicians.

When Henry was sixteen, he had met an actress, twice his age, with whom he had secretly fallen in love — during a family vacation. One day he asked her to laugh. She did so with ease. “Now cry,” he said. She could cry at will. When asked which was easier, she surprised him by replying, “to cry.” Henry was so impressed that he tried to train himself to cry at will. It was not at all easy, but when he finally managed it, he felt happy. Henry imagined that it was perhaps because of these sessions that he had become a

crybaby or *pleurnicheur*, as Fred Perlès often called him. It was always easy for Henry to laugh. He felt he had been born laughing. He even laughed, he claimed, at funerals.

When Henry visited burlesque theaters, like Minsky's, his favorite part of the show was the comedians. They had a style that derived from *comedia del arte*. What pleased him most was the blend of obscenity and humor. The two seemed inseparable. A clown was something different. No matter how funny his antics, the clown always left Henry feeling a bit sad at the end.²⁷ Burlesque comedians gave one a sense of freedom. They gave Henry courage — the courage to say or do anything he pleased.

²⁷ See Karl Orend Henry Miller's *Angelic Clown* Alyscamps Press 2007.

This contrasted with the books of one of his favorite authors, Kawabata. He thought of *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, where the visitors to the house (old men and perverts) had the right to sleep alongside beautiful women, touch them all over, but not to make love to them. This took away all sense of freedom. It reeked of a form of oriental cruelty. For example, when a man is almost ready to make love to one of the women, he discovers she is dead. “Don’t worry about it,” the Madame tells him, “We’ll have a replacement for you in a moment. Just hang on a bit.” Henry thought the role could have been played well by Michel Simon.²⁸ The Madame could come from any of the whorehouses around St. Denis or the rue Sebastopol.

²⁸ François Michel Simon (1875-1975): Swiss actor famous for his work with Jean Renoir.

Henry saw oriental writers as using cruelty as a kind of spice. One could imagine why, at the height of refinement, the Chinese discovered torture, all kinds of torture. Frank Harris wrote a story entitled *A Chinese Story*,²⁹ which was filled with an almost unimaginable mix of horror and beauty. That reminded him of St. Sulpice church, in Paris, which he thought the most unpleasant church in the city. It was facing this church, in a small café, that he often used to meet his friends, including Man Ray and Brassäi. One could say that the sight of this church had inspired them.

Thinking of Parisian cathedrals and churches, he recalled one where there was a statue of Joan of Arc at the foot of its steps. This was the statue he liked the best, just as in California he liked the statue of St. Francis on

²⁹ In *The Short Stories of Frank Harris* edited by Elmer Gertz Southern Illinois U.P. 1975.

horseback, by his friend Benjamin Bufano. In front of this Parisian church, Miller had once met a painter, whose name he could not recall. Because of their conversation he had taken a taxi home and painted a watercolor of the cathedral. He found it difficult to even draw someone on horseback. He felt that the spirit of Hokusai had taken possession of him, and he had succeeded. He could no longer recall the name of the church.

Henry thought again of sobs. It seemed that it was in the 17th *arrondissement* that he had heard them most. This *arrondissement* was a sort of bourgeois horror in the middle of Paris. It was also here that he had discovered his beloved ping-pong halls.

In *The Books in My Life*, Henry had spoken of Marie Corelli. Even if she had always been

considered only a middlebrow writer, her admirers had included William Gladstone and Oscar Wilde. Miller recalled that Corelli gave piano recitals. She did not play the works of famous composers, but rather her own improvisations. Henry did not know of any other virtuoso who did this, not even Paganini or Liszt.³⁰ He wanted to recommend her book *The Sorrows of Satan* to his readers.³¹ He thought that with the advent of modern feminism she would have been revived, but instead no one seemed to speak of her anymore. Henry considered her to be the greatest author about love. By this, he meant pure love, the love of angels or seraphims.

When Miller visited Switzerland, he had been the guest of George Simenon. Simenon was living in a small chateau, in which he had a

³⁰ Keith Jarrett is an example.

³¹ Marie Corelli *The Sorrows of Satan* Oxford U.P. 1998.

room dedicated solely to writing. Each morning they talked in his workroom. The first thing Simenon drew Miller's attention to was a vase filled with pencils and crayons. He claimed he didn't know how to type. The first thing Simenon did every morning was to sharpen his pencils. His wife was an expert typist and helped him enormously with his work. One day, he took Miller to a favorite tree, which he pissed against every morning. Henry wondered, why this tree and not another? It was more than a habit, Simenon explained, it was an obsession.

Miller wrote that he had always liked Simenon's books. André Gide had called him "the Balzac of our time." Henry thought he deserved the compliment. He seemed to have a profound knowledge of all kinds of things. He always seemed at ease. He wrote

effortlessly and produced a book in record time. Cendrars could also write rapidly. Even with only one arm, Cendrars had achieved things an ordinary writer could never have dreamed of.

Henry was suddenly reminded of John Ruskin. He had always detested Ruskin. Henry's father, who never usually read books, had read Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*. Henry had no idea why. It was Ruskin, Miller recalled, who had destroyed so many canvasses by Turner, because he deemed them pornographic.³² It was also Ruskin who had fought with Whistler because he did not consider the canvas "The Battersea Bridge," as art. Whistler fought back and ridiculed him.

³² At the time of writing, this was generally believed to be true, but was later proved to be false.

Ruskin reminded Henry of another “pain in the ass,” Dr. Johnson. At high school, Henry had an English teacher whom he found conceited. Yet, he had always esteemed Henry. One day, he instructed his pupils to write an essay using the style of Dr. Johnson. Instead of doing this, Henry stole a passage directly from Johnson’s conversations with Boswell. The next day the teacher told Henry to read his essay aloud to the class. Henry did so, even though he was trembling because he thought the teacher had recognized the plagiarism. Instead, when Henry finished the teacher applauded and shouted “bravo!” Miller wondered if he had even read Johnson’s work. This inspired Henry, when in Paris in the 1930s to include plagiarisms from James Joyce and other writers in his books, as a surrealist joke, aimed at his critics.

Following this episode, Henry had become the teacher's favorite. One day he approached Henry to become editor of the school magazine. Miller replied that he had no talent for writing. He suggested a friend named Finkelstein instead. The teacher got angry and insisted. Henry believed he refused because Finkelstein was Jewish, and the teacher was an Anti-Semite. Eventually, the job went to an Irish girl.

Miller asked why he even bothered to mention such trivia when there was a living writer whom he considered the master of French prose — Joseph Delteil. A few days earlier, he had received a handwritten letter from his friend, which expounded for pages on the joys of writing in a foreign language. His comments suggested to Miller that he had discovered a new language or “langage”

where there was no fixed grammar, orthography, no correct usage, but rather complete freedom of expression. This had a liberating effect on Henry, who claimed he struggled to express even the simplest ideas in French. It was not necessary, said Miller, that his texts be intelligible, if they were readable. Not everyone could understand the texts of authors such as Rimbaud, Rabelais, Cendrars and Céline. He also thought of Lewis Carroll. In contrast, he considered Joseph Delteil the master of the French language. Henry thought that Parisians and northern French people would probably not agree. Delteil's spirit was in direct contrast to theirs. He did not search for perfect phrases — rather, he danced, sang, joked, insulted, and took every kind of liberty with the language, except sacrilege. Miller saw Delteil as a true believer, at home with God and the angels. He believed in miracles.



Miller considered Delteil a miracle. Henry claimed that the majority of Delteil's readers refused to see the obvious. They saw him as a kind of acrobat, exhibitionist, or deep-sea diver. To Henry, Delteil was the personification of beauty, tenderness, compassion and understanding. He was a hidden gem in the heart of modern literature. He was a virtuoso, who could be called "a darling of the Gods." Henry believed that Delteil was virtually unknown in English because there were no translators able to capture the essence of his prose. Miller claimed this was often the case for the truly great and original. He believed there had been no fine translations of Pushkin, Pindar, Hölderlin and many other revolutionary writers. Americans seemed simply content with *vin ordinaire*, instead of great vintages! His passion for Delteil's work knew no bounds.

These two writers are barely linked in any studies or biographies of Miller. There are many more examples of great writers Miller felt close to that remain to be explored in the anglophone world.

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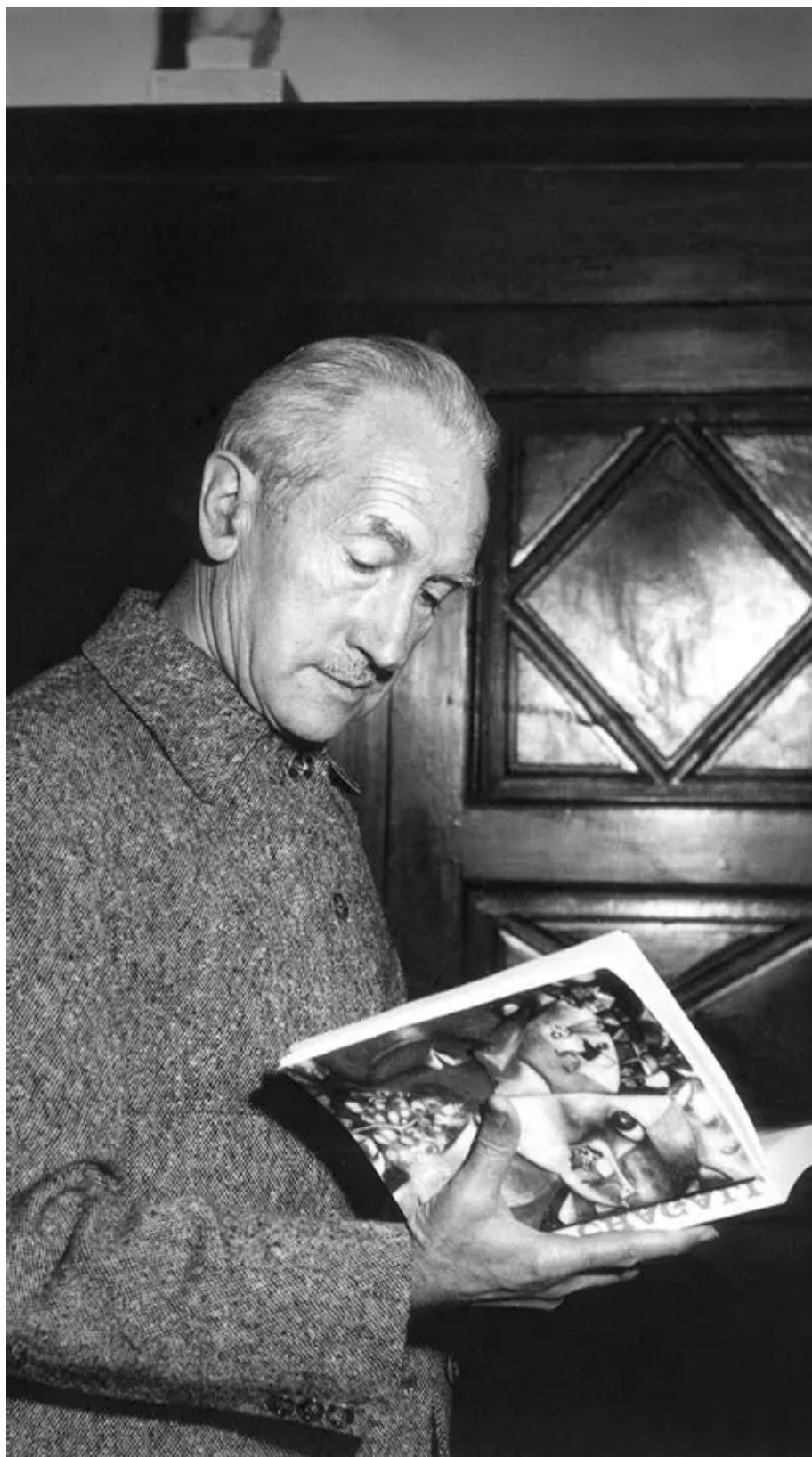
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The Magician, Joseph Delteil

The date at which Henry Miller first discovered Joseph Delteil is unknown. It may have been through his friend Samuel Putnam, who translated Delteil's work in 1932, from Putnam's book on Rabelais, from the connection between Delteil and Surrealism, or the 1928 film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, which was a collaboration, between Delteil, Antonin Artaud and Carl Theodor Dreyer. Miller and Delteil corresponded, with lapses, from 1935 to 1978. Their surviving letters were published in French, by Belfond, in *Henry Miller-Joseph Delteil Correspondance Privée* in the year of Miller's death, 1980, edited by their mutual friend Frédéric-Jacques Temple.

Henry Miller wrote his first surviving letter to Joseph Delteil, during his visit to New York City, on May 16th 1935, described in *Aller Retour New York*. Henry had earlier sent a copy of *Tropic of Cancer*, attempting to solicit support of his recently published book. Miller sent *Cancer* to several leading French writers, ranging from Céline and Cendrars to Paul Valéry, André Breton, and Tristan Tzara. Delteil was born April 20th 1894. Slightly younger than Miller, he was already an established literary figure. He was the son of a *paysan* from Languedoc. Having excelled in school, and after serving in the military in World War One, he joined the Surrealist movement. His first novel, *Sur le Fleuve Amour*, appeared in 1923. Delteil was close to several leading surrealist figures, including Breton, Soupault and Aragon — but was expelled from the group in 1925, when he published

Jeanne d'Arc, which won the Prix Femina. This formed the basis of the 1928 film, which he co-wrote with director Carl Theodor Dreyer, co-starring Antonin Artaud. Delteil, unable to stand the world of publishing and the literary crowd, recovering from pleurisy, abandoned literature in 1931, following the appearance of several bestsellers. Later, he became a friend of Louis-Ferdinand Céline. He did not resume publishing until after World War Two.



In 1930 Delteil met an American, Caroline Dudley, who was known in Paris for establishing the *Revue Nègre*, starring Josephine Baker. The couple soon retired to the outskirts of Montpellier, where Delteil continued to write and live the life of a local farmer.

When Henry Miller wrote from New York on May 16th 1935, he sent along his article “Glittering Pie,” which had recently been published in a dance program for a benefit for impoverished artists in Westchester! It also appeared in *The Harvard Advocate*, September 1935, and was promptly banned. Henry told Delteil that he had often wanted to write him a long letter but had never had the courage or a pretext. Upon his return to Paris, Miller wrote again on July 3rd, telling Delteil that he had recently spent an evening talking about

his work with the Harvey family. Dorothy Dudley Harvey, wife of Henry Blodgett Harvey, was a writer and the sister of Caroline Dudley. Henry had met Dorothy after reading her 1932 book on Theodore Dreiser, *Forgotten Frontiers*. Dreiser had been the influence behind Henry's book *Twelve Messengers*. Madame Harvey had several connections to major literary figures Miller admired, including Sherwood Anderson, Harriett Munroe, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg. Miller intended to read *Sur la Fleuve Amour*, which he had been waiting to read for three years, after discussions with Samuel Putnam, and reading about it in Putnam's study of Rabelais. Miller sent Delteil a copy of a manuscript, which eventually became *Aller Retour New York*. The text was written in three parts, in different locations — New York City, on a Dutch ocean liner, and back in

Paris. “Each time I open the pages of one of your books, I expect a miracle,” Miller wrote. “You seem to have kept alive the sense of the miraculous.”

Before leaving America, Miller had met editor Julian Leigh, whom he had tried to interest in publishing Delteil’s books in English. Henry planned to take a trip to the south with Fred Perlès in September, during which they would visit him. The journey never took place. Miller’s subsequent letters are missing. The known correspondence resumes on August 3rd 1937 when Miller wrote to ask Delteil to contribute to *The Booster*. For unknown reasons, he failed to do so.

On December 15th, 1937, Delteil married Caroline Dudley, after several years of living together. The other letters between Miller and

Delteil from the 1930s are again un-located. Their surviving correspondence only resumes in 1951 — by which time Miller was a famous writer in France, thanks to the prosecution know as *le cas Miller*. Delteil resumed publishing, with *Jésus II*, in 1947, and found a way to contact Miller, to renew their friendship. Miller had spent one evening together, back in France, many years before. Miller read *Jesus II* and loved it. He had also written to Maurice Girodias to send Delteil and his wife the *Tropics*. Henry also sent *Colossus of Maroussi*. Miller had finished writing the first volume of *The Books in my Life*. He signaled his intention to write about Delteil in the planned sequel, which never appeared.

Joseph Delteil read the *Tropics* in detail for the first time in 1951. He greatly admired them. It was, however, when combining these with

Colossus that Delteil believed one discovered the real Henry Miller. He saw Miller as a kind of saint — his literary quest as the restoration of the divine element within man.

On April 28th 1951, Miller wrote to Delteil and explained that at the end of Samuel Putnam's book on Rabelais, which he read in 1932, he had noted the phrase:

“The three great prose writers in the French language are Flaubert, Stendhal and Delteil.”

This had stayed with him all these years, as had the only evening they had ever spent together, in Paris. Delteil sent Miller a photo of himself, taken at the Calage Abbey. He resembled Miller's childhood friend Stanley Borowski. They had a mutual fascination with

Zen and Rabelais.³³ Miller's friend Wallace Fowlie had also met Delteil, in Languedoc, in 1950.³⁴ Madame Delteil came to a lecture by Fowlie at the University of Montpellier and invited him to lunch the next day. Delteil made Fowlie a gift of several of his books — but Fowlie did not like Delteil much as a person. Miller mentioned to Delteil that the Ministry of the Interior had banned *Sexus* in France, in both French and English editions.

Miller and Delteil continued to exchange books and recommendations for books to read. Miller suggested he read Arthur Machen, who had been an influence on *Crazy Cock* and

³³ For Miller and Rabelais see Karl Orend's essay in Henry Miller's Letter from Dijon Jackson Publishing 2005 and John Parkin Henry Miller: The Modern Rabelais by Edward Mellen Press.

³⁴ For Miller and Fowlie see Karl Orend Henry Miller's Angelic Clown: Reflections on The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder and Letters of Henry Miller & Wallace Fowlie Grove 1975.

Haniel Long's *The Power Within Us* (for which Henry wrote a preface). He also sent along Charles de Fontbrune's study of Nostradamus.

On May 9th 1951, Miller told Delteil that the only book of his he possessed was *Jésus II*. He asked for others, and recommended Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, which had been an important influence on *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*. Miller told Delteil that he saw in him a Chinese spirit, rather like Henry imagined himself to be. Miller claimed he found all he needed in Zen — but especially in laughter.

On November 17th 1951, Delteil wrote to Miller that Provence and Languedoc were infused with ancient mysteries and beliefs. He saw parallels with the Orient. Greater than the

nations formed by politicians were “nations of the heart.” On December 5th, Miller replied, suggesting that Delteil try to get published by Corr  a, where his friend Maurice Nadeau was an editor. Nadeau had just agreed to issue French versions of *The World of Sex* and *Plexus*. Miller had planned to visit France but had been delayed due to the breakdown of his marriage to his third wife, Lepska.

Joseph Delteil wrote on May 29th 1952 that he had read *The World of Sex*, *The Time of the Assassins*, and was about to begin *Plexus*. Comparing Henry to a force of nature, he wrote that there was an unbreakable spirit in Miller’s work, which could only be described as genius. The flow of Miller’s prose resembled one of the great rivers of America, like the Mississippi. He had been especially moved by *Time of the Assassins*, in which so

much of Henry was revealed. Delteil saw that Miller had captured the essence of Rimbaud in stating that he (like Miller himself) was not trying to promote a new school of literature, but rather offer a new way of life.

Delteil wrote:

“What enthuses me most about you, is your future. There is a kind of prophet in you (more like Mohammed than Buddha) ...you are at the beginning of something extraordinary...”

In 1953, Miller decided to visit France with his new lover, Eve McClure. Delteil planned to be in Spain between May 15th and June 10th but welcomed a visit from Henry. Miller and Eve (whom he married in December 1953) set out for Paris in April. They visited Bruges and

then decided, on May 2nd, that if there were room in the car, they would join Delteil and his wife on the drive down to Spain. Alfred Perlès was also planning to meet Henry in Barcelona.³⁵ The trip is described in *Reunion in Barcelona*.

After their journey to Spain, Miller wrote to Delteil from Périgeux on July 11th. He said that he had to return to Paris, to appear before an examining magistrate on July 23rd — to be interviewed about the banning of his books. Their return to America was scheduled for July 27th. Miller had visited John Cowper

³⁵ See Henry Miller *Reunion in Barcelona* and Alfred Perlès *Reunion in Big Sur*, both Scorpion Press, 1959. Fred arrived in Barcelona on May 8th. Miller had not seen him for 14 years and so wanted to be sure to get a few days together. Henry and Eve planned to arrive at Delteil's home on the 12th, after spending one night in Avignon. They then set out for Barcelona.

Powys³⁶ in Wales and was now spending a couple of days with Nostradamus expert Charles de Fontbrune.³⁷ Miller continued to think of Delteil often during the remainder of his visit to France, and especially of an evening spent in their garden, when Miller had been moved to pray.

On July 24th 1953, Eve McClure wrote to the Delteils about the great sense of disorientation she and Henry felt at leaving France. They had spent four months together with Lilik (Bezalel) and Louise Schatz. For the last few days, Henry and Eve stayed with Georges Belmont (Pelorsen) at his apartment on the boulevard St. Michel, facing the

³⁶ See *Henry Miller-John Cowper Powys: Correspondance Privée* edited by Nordine Haddad Éditions Criterion 1994.

³⁷ For an account of this visit see Charles de Fontbrune *Henry Miller & Nostradamus* Éditions du Rocher 1994 and Brassai *Henry Miller Happy Rock* Chicago U.P. 2002.

Luxembourg Gardens.³⁸ Miller returned to Big Sur, from where he sent Delteil a piece of fossilized wood, a talisman from his “paradise.”³⁹

When Henry Miller next wrote to Joseph Delteil, on September 17th, he addressed him as “illustrious master, magician and archangel!” He had just reread a book Delteil had given him in July, *De Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Mistral* (Éditions de Capitoile, Paris 1928). The chapter dealing with Frédéric Mistral and

³⁸ Pelorsen-Belmont carried out one of the most important interviews with Miller — *Les Entretiens de Paris* Archives Sonores, Paris 1998. See also “Transition to Vichy: The Case of Georges Pelorsen” by Vincent Giroud in *Modernism/Modernity* volume 7 number 2 pp.221-48 John Hopkins University Press 2000.

³⁹ For Miller’s Big Sur years see Karl Orend *The Brotherhood of Fools & Simpletons: Gods & Devils in Henry Miller’s Utopia* Alyscamps Press 2005 and Elayne Waering Fitzpatrick *Doing it With the Cosmos* XLibris 2001.

Provence fascinated Henry.⁴⁰ Miller recalled how Samuel Putnam had, on more than one occasion, saluted Delteil as one of the greatest French prose stylists. Miller believed Delteil was much more than that — and that Delteil’s refusal to publish had more important repercussions than the purely literary. Miller was awaiting Delteil’s new book on St Francis, “like a convert waits for their daily Bible reading.” Miller lamented that Delteil’s work was little known in the USA — a place that Miller saw as feeling like “the end of the world.” Americans, Henry saw as “ghosts...ridiculous from every point of view.”

Miller informed Delteil of his marriage to Eve McClure by letter, on February 4th 1954.

⁴⁰ Mistral won the Nobel Prize for Literature. See *The Memoirs of Frédéric Mistral* Alyscamps Press 1994 and *Mistral* by Rob Lyle Alyscamps Press.

Henry had written up an account of their trip to Spain, which was refused by *Le Figaro*. He hoped it might appear in *Revue des Voyages*. In the meantime, Delteil had written an article for *Prospectus* about Haniel Long's *La Merveilleuse Aventure de Cabeza de Vaca*, which had appeared with Miller's preface. Miller recommended *Les Soucoupes Volantes ont atterri* by Desmond Leslie and George Adamski. Henry was convinced that we would soon have contact with extra-terrestrials!

On June 19th 1955, Miller wrote to Delteil to inform him that he would make an appearance in a new book underway — *Big Sur & the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. On November 14th 1955, Miller had Eve forward an excerpt, in part, he said, to be sure he had not made any errors in his citations from

Delteil's *Jésus II*. Miller had written no major work for three years but was now in full flow.

Eve wrote to Delteil:

“This is the fruit of a long gestation period. He gets up at five every morning and goes to the typewriter long before I get out of bed, and works non-stop, at full speed, until late in the afternoon. Then we play a few games of ping-pong...we have an aperitif with dinner and are in bed by nine.”

Henry hoped to visit both Europe and Japan once his current book was finished. The Japanese had recently agreed to print most of his major work in both English and Japanese and to organize an exhibition of his watercolors.

Delteil wrote an appreciative letter concerning the extract from *Big Sur* (December 15th 1955). He had recently read a special number of *Tour de Feu*, devoted to Miller.⁴¹ Henry and Eve did not visit France again until April 14th, 1959. Correspondence from the intervening years is un-located.⁴² A glimpse of this visit is provided in Brassai's *Henry Miller-Happy Rock*. They returned to Big Sur in August. On October 21st 1959, Delteil mailed Miller some proofs of his forthcoming book on St. Francis, which Henry was anxious to read. In January 1960, Delteil sent Miller an account of his personality compiled by a young graphologist, who had examined his script.

⁴¹ *Tour de Feu* number 47, autumn 1955.

⁴² The gaps in the Miller-Delteil correspondence, published in French, may also suggested that Miller destroyed or withheld letters he did not want made public. This was something he regularly did.

She described Henry as:

“Likeable. Lots of personality. Needs human contact but, at times, likes to withdraw. Loves to talk. Very sensitive and enthusiastic. Impulsive and reflective. Authoritarian. Very charming, but given to sudden abruptness, cruelty, or harshness. Loves life. Uninhibited. Sensual. Passionate. Intellectually curious. Secretive. Very nervous. Tormented. Impulsive. Very active. Can’t stay still. An aesthete. Mood swings. Strong sense of pride, which he seeks to hide.”

Miller wrote a review of Delteil’s *François d’Assise* (Flammarion 1960), which he forwarded on March 19th. Henry was working at full speed. He had intended to go to Japan, but instead accepted an offer to be a member of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival, from

May 3rd-20th. Henry left Big Sur on April 4th to accommodate a series of visits to other European countries. Henry had hesitations about publishing his review of Delteil's book in Jean Fanchette's Paris-based *Two Cities* and asked him to correct any errors or misconceptions in the text. It appeared in May 1960.⁴³

Miller tried to arrange a German publisher for some of Delteil's work, notably *St. François*, in the spring of 1961, when he was on his abortive trip to discover a home for his family and the next woman he intended to marry, Renate Gerhardt. Gerhardt is an unjustly glossed over name in accounts of the life of Henry Miller. In his edition of *The Durrell-Miller Letters*, Ian S. MacNiven describes

⁴³ Miller rewrote the text three times, but still felt insecure about the result.

Miller, traveling in Germany, in 1960. Here, he encountered:

“Renate Gerhardt, a beautiful widow and the English language editor with his German publisher, Rowohlt.” “Soon,” writes MacNiven, “they are talking about marriage and a European home for their respective children.”

Frau Gerhardt worked on editing translations of English-language books, before eventually leaving Rowohlt to start her eponymous press, in 1962.

In a letter, to Lawrence Durrell, of December 6th 1960, Miller wrote:

“She’s a great worker, Renate. Knows French and English quite well, has done lots of

translations, knows many artists and writers I know — our paths have crossed in many curious ways over the last seven years. And most importantly, we get on famously on every level.”

The extent of Miller’s contact with Renate Gerhardt during those previous seven years is uncertain. It has been claimed, by Jay Martin, that her deceased husband “discovered” Miller for a German audience, when he published their joint translation of a chapter of *Tropic of Cancer*, in the journal *Fragmenten*.⁴⁴ Miller was enormously famous (and a best seller) in France, after 1945, due to the *cas Miller*.⁴⁵ Discovering Henry would not have been difficult. H. M. Leidig-Rowohlt, Miller’s

⁴⁴ Rowohlt Verlag published the complete text in 1953 as *Wenderkreis des Krebses*, translated by Kurt Wagenseil (Shifreen & Jackson D203).

⁴⁵ See the article by Karl Orend, on this topic, in *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal* volume 3, 2006.

main German publisher for decades (and Renate's employer at the time they met), describes his first encounter with Miller's books as occurring in the winter of 1947.⁴⁶ He subsequently published translations of two texts by Miller in a magazine he edited, entitled *Story: Erzähler des Auslandes*, in the issues of December 1947 and March 1948. It is probable that Renate Gerhardt worked on editing translations of Miller's work into German, for Rowohlt, long before they met. Henry's comments imply a deeper connection than that, possibly though mutual friends — what exactly that link was is a path to be investigated by future scholars.

Existing biographies of Henry Miller give brief accounts of the relationship with Renate

⁴⁶ See H. M. Leidig-Rowohlt *Vorwort*, published in C. P. Standish *Henry Miller: A Book of Tributes* Standishbooks 1995.

Gerhardt. Jay Martin wrote an impressionistic portrait of Miller falling rapidly in love with this young woman (mid-30s), whose husband had been dead for seven years, following conversations about how badly Kurt Wagenseil had (allegedly) translated *Tropic of Cancer*. When Miller traveled to Europe, in 1960, to be a judge at the Cannes Film Festival, it was with his mistress, Caryl Hill, whom he had met while she was waitressing at Nepenthe — a favorite Big Sur restaurant-bar. Henry was still married to Eve, who remained in Big Sur. Relations between the two had been strained for years.

Eve and Henry Miller decided to divorce by May 1960. Jay Martin implies that Henry's open infidelities and complete indifference to her as a person drove Eve deep into bottles of alcohol, from which she never emerged. She

died, in August 1965, from the effects, it is claimed, of alcoholism and clinical depression. Caryl Hill soon faded from the picture, back in mid-1960. Renate Gerhardt, for a time, became the object of Henry Miller's undivided attention. For over a year, Miller planned to marry Renate and settle, with their respective children, in Europe. The plan never reached fruition. Despite this, they remained in touch for years. Their unpublished letters provide an insight into how Miller's mind worked in affairs of the heart. They illustrate his changing emotional state during the period when his books were being prosecuted *en masse* and then, when his reputation was finally established in The United States.

Already, by 1960, Henry Miller's major books had been banned, in America, for decades. Various attempts had been made to fight

prosecution, without success. The only available editions of several titles continued to be piracies and the volumes issued, over the previous twenty-five years, first by Jack Kahane's Obelisk Press and, subsequently, by his son, Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press. Published in Paris, by Obelisk Press, in September 1934, *Tropic of Cancer* was not issued for general American circulation until the Grove publication, of June 24th 1961. Prior to this, there had been twenty-nine editions, either issued, with Miller's agreement, in Paris, or as international piracies from as far away as Shanghai. Miller was even indicted (and convicted *in absentia*), in Kings County, Brooklyn, in 1961, following the publication of the Grove edition, for "conspiracy to produce an obscene book." One previous American version of *Cancer* had been published — the *Medusa* edition, of April

1940, which was issued underground, without Miller's direct involvement.⁴⁷ Henry Miller did, however, have an enormous international reputation by 1960. He was considered a major author internationally, was famous in France and a bestseller in various languages. Miller was widely read and influential, even in America, if only in privately circulated copies of his most important books.

Italo Calvino had recently written, in his diary, that:

“It was a completely different
turn American literature had

⁴⁷ Miller initially supported the idea of this edition, but then withdrew. It proceeded without him. See the letters written by Miller to Gershon Legman in *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal* volume 1 2003. Also Karl Orend *Our Art & Name Are All We Have: Henry Miller's Opus Pistorum* Alyscamps Press 2023.

taken, and when, in 1959, I went to the United States for the first time as an adult, the mythical picture of the writers of the early post-war years, which was that of the Lost Generation, no longer held sway. This was a time when a figure like Henry Miller was much more important than Hemingway, whom nobody bothered about anymore.”

In 1957, Miller was inducted into the American Academy of Arts & Letters. Karl Shapiro acclaimed him, as “the greatest living author,” in 1959.⁴⁸ Once over sixty court battles were fought, across America, in the years 1961-64, the Supreme Court decision to allow *Cancer* to circulate freely changed,

⁴⁸ In an essay reproduced in C. P. Standish *Henry Miller: A Book of Tributes* Standishbooks 1994.

forever, the course of publishing freedom of expression. The man Renate Gerhardt met, in 1960, was on the brink of being at the height of his fame and influence. Grove paid an advance of \$50,000, in 1961, for the rights to *Cancer*. His books sold millions of copies over the next decade. Films were made of *Tropic of Cancer* and *Quiet Days in Clichy* in the mid-1960s. Several studies of Miller's *opus* appeared during the 60s and early-1970s, together with volumes of published correspondence between Miller and writer friends, such as Lawrence Durrell, Alfred Perlès and Anaïs Nin, and critics such as Wallace Fowlie, William Gordon, and J. Rives Childes.

With the advent of the political power of feminism, from the early 1970s, Miller became increasingly a writer to be discarded or

despised, despite the efforts of admirers, such as Norman Mailer, to defend him.⁴⁹ Simplistically, it is generally assumed that Miller's decline was attributable to the influence of Kate Millet, in her book *Sexual Politics*. In fact, although Millet attacked certain aspects of Miller's work, she also wrote of him as: "surely one of the major figures of American literature today" and as "likely to be one of the most important influences on contemporary writing." Millet also lamented the fact that academics and scholars did not study his work more extensively and conspired to dismiss him as "beneath scholarly attention."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Mailer issued various essays on Miller, listed in Shifreen. He also edited an annotated anthology of Miller's work, entitled *Genius & Lust* Grove Press 1976.

⁵⁰ See Miller's letter to Millet, reprinted in *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*, volume 4, 2007.

Henry Miller, at the time he wooed Renate Gerhardt, can be glimpsed in two published accounts. Vincent Birge, who was his secretary/chauffeur/interpreter during travels in Europe 1960-61, wrote of this period in *Travels With Henry: Searching for Shangri-La*, published in C. P. Standish's *Henry Miller: A Book of Tributes* (Standishbooks 1995). Miller was sixty-nine, when he met Renate. According to Birge, Henry was already showing signs of declining health. He reports digestive upsets, fatigue, blurred vision, hip pains, and bouts of chronic depression. Sometimes, Miller would be so depressed he would take to bed for days or weeks at a time. The two men traveled across Europe, searching for a home for Henry and Renate for eight months. They covered some 20,000 kilometers, correcting proofs of the Grove Press edition of *Cancer* as they went. Henry

even finalized his divorce from Eve, at The American Consulate, in Geneva, *en route*.

Brassaï wrote about several of his meetings with Henry Miller in *Henry Miller — Happy Rock*. This book offers the best glimpse, so far published, of Henry Miller, behind the scenes, at the time he was in love with Renate. The author even quotes short passages from letters Miller wrote him, about his blossoming love affair. Brassaï (who likened Gerhardt to Joan of Arc, because of her spirit and bobbed hairstyle) mentions Miller's ever-changing moods. Henry finally sank, he claims, into "depression, discouragement and incessant flight." He describes this period as "perhaps the most agitated time" in Henry Miller's long life. "All his letters," Brassaï wrote, comparing Miller and Birge, on their travels to find a home for Renate, to Don Quixote and

Sancho Panza, “revealed his distress.” Brassai’s wife, Gilberte, meantime, accused Miller of being “incapable of loving.” This book would cost Brassai Miller’s friendship, when published, in French, the mid-1970s. It was too revealing of the darker and unstable side of his personality and of the disregard he often had for women he had once claimed to love.

Brassai is certainly correct in his assumption that Renate’s German nationality and *Kultur* played an important role in Miller’s attraction. Henry had been German speaking before he learned English. He was infused with German language and literature. He was, he believed himself, Germanic in many of his personality traits, such as his love of order and cleanliness. He constantly surrounded himself

with German friends.⁵¹ This identification caused immense self-loathing, because he also associated Germans with the Holocaust, stupidity, racism, bigotry, hatred, hypocrisy, and a series of indolent and arrogant characteristics, and with his parents, whom he always knew did not understand him, and whom he feared (wrongly) did not love him. His negative notion of Germans could be illustrated by viewing the caricatures of one of Miller's favorite writer-painters, George Grosz.⁵²

On March 13th 1961, infatuated with Renate, Miller informed Joseph Delteil that he had written a play, *Just Wild About Harry*, which

⁵¹ Many of his friends were otherwise Jewish German speakers, who he clearly distinguished from German Christians.

⁵² See Henry Miller *Man in the Zoo: George Grosz' Ecce Homo* (Shifreen & Jackson A179)

contained a great deal of music.⁵³ During these months, Delteil wrote to Henry, trying to lift his spirits. By August 1961, his French publisher was hoping Henry might write a short book on Delteil, in the style of Jean Giono's *Pour Saluer Melville*. That month Henry spent a week with the Italian sculptor Marino Marini, who sculpted Miller's head at the suggestion of German gallery owner Rudolf Springer. Henry had long-since promised *Nexus II* to his publishers but was unable to advance the manuscript.⁵⁴ Suffering from writers' block, he was obliged to refuse to write on Delteil,⁵⁵ but informed him on

⁵³ See Karl Orend *Orchestrating Reality: Notes of Musical Form in the Writings of Henry Miller & Anaïs Nin* Alyscamps Press 2007.

⁵⁴ Henry Miller *Nexus 2* Éditions Autrement Littératures, Paris 2004.

⁵⁵ Miller did contribute to *The Aylesford Review* on Delteil. Shifreen & Jackson *Henry Miller: A Bibliography of Primary Sources* Alyscamps Press 1993. C 416, C 417.

August 21st that Marini's sculpture was ready, in plaster cast.⁵⁶

Henry Miller, back in Big Sur, was able to work on *Nexus II* during the winter of 1961-62. Delteil forwarded his *Oeuvres complètes*⁵⁷ to Henry, which he found "magnificent." As of February 2nd 1962, Miller informed him, there were 53 court cases in progress against *Tropic of Cancer* in the United States. Henry and Delteil both signed the colophon of a special issue of *The Aylesford Review*, but, after reading the issue, with tears in his eyes, Miller wrote to Delteil on November 29th that he had not done his friend justice. Henry told Delteil that he was already a saint — one of the immortals. Miller, feeling inadequate, saw

⁵⁶ It appears on the cover of *Henry Miller on Writing*, edited by Thomas H. Moore, published by New Directions, 1964.

⁵⁷ It was Delteil's sense of humor that his complete works contained only 6 books out of the nearly forty he wrote.

Delteil as living in a state of beatitude — himself just the opposite.

“Every day my life becomes more difficult, problems augment, demands of others exhaust me.... You chose the right path, while I wander from it. I am at the mercy of everybody.”

Delteil reassured Miller by quoting some of Miller's comments, embedded in his tribute, which he felt had encapsulated his own spirit. Henry Miller moved to 444 Ocampo Drive, Pacific Palisades on February 7th 1963. The correspondence between Miller and Delteil became sparser, slowing to a trickle. Their mutual friend Frédéric-Jacques Temple kept Delteil appraised of Miller's life. Miller married Hoki Tokuda in September 1967. They came to Paris, for a watercolor

exhibition and to film for *The Henry Miller Odyssey* with Robert Snyder, then spent time with Durrell and Delteil in the south of France.

In June 1969, Miller returned to reading Delteil and wrote him a letter of praise and appreciation. No further letters are known until April 29th 1973, when Miller wrote praising Delteil's work, *Alphabet*. In this text Henry saw Delteil's anarchist spirit shine through:

“There are phrases and thoughts in your *Alphabet* that make me jealous. I am so very much in agreement with you, so often, but I lack your genius for expressing things in the exact words that are needed — invaluable, yet poisoned with love, wisdom, and joy.”

Henry's health was giving way, but he felt more filled with ideas for writing than ever.

On May 24th 1973 Miller wrote to Delteil :

“I am not a Christian, nor a pagan, nothing else besides, but thanks to you I believe Francis of Assisi remains the greatest man of our civilization.”

Henry spent a week of May 1974 entertaining a crew from France, led by Michèle Arnaud, who was making a documentary about him for French TV.

On December 17th 1974 Miller wrote to the Delteils:

“I am completely Gnostic, anarchist, all that is destructive, or simply against. I don't believe

that the earth is some kind of cosmic error, but rather that we are all insane. Crazy in the worst sense. I am waiting for the end of the world — with joy. With age I become more of a rebel, or is it simply more revolted? I am not tormented, simply disgusted. I have no ideology, no hope, but...a great deal of love. I like what St. Augustine said: ‘Love God and do as you please...Hurrah for the Karamazovs!’⁵⁸

On July 18th 1975 Miller wrote to Caroline Delteil to inform her he was writing a short book in French — and asked her to verify a quote from her husband that he wished to include in *Je ne suis pas plus con qu’un autre*. Henry had given the manuscript to a French-Canadian typist, who, not realizing he wanted the text left as written, started to correct his

⁵⁸ Miller reuses phrases and ideas from his letter to Delteil and the Arnaud film in *Je ne suis pas plus con qu’un autre*.

grammatical errors and syntax. Delteil himself replied to Miller, on July 29th. This reply was used, in a modified form, as a preface to the published version of *Je ne suis*.⁵⁹ By the start of August, the manuscript was retyped as Miller had written it. Henry struggled a great deal to write in French. He was surprised to realize that German was easier for him.

On September 13th, Miller asked Delteil's permission to send his earlier letter about writing in French to Claude Gallimard for inclusion as an appendix to *Je ne suis*. Delteil agreed. Miller made a few modifications to both Delteil's text and his own over the following weeks. Henry was anxious that Delteil not read Brassai's book *Henry Miller: The Paris Years* — even more so the sequel, since he felt deeply embarrassed that Brassai

⁵⁹ Miller's reference to Peter Falk in the book was inspired by a friend of his who worked for the actor

had revealed so much of his writing technique and Miller's relationship with Eve, to whom both Delteil and his wife had been close.

On March 25th 1976 Delteil wrote a long, joyful letter in which he said:

“One of the great blessings of my life, naturally, is to have known Henry Miller...I cannot think of you without thinking of latent creations, of lost paradises.”

Feeling old age weighing upon him and death perhaps approaching them both, Delteil wanted to salute Miller and to express his sentiment that their coming together had religious origins. It was destiny.

Henry Miller's health continued to decline. In late 1976, already blind in one eye, deaf in one

ear and weak, he had a bad fall in his bathroom, from which he recovered slowly. He was unable to read the copy of *Le Sacré Corps*, which Delteil sent him.

On June 9th 1977, Henry wrote to Delteil:

“Yes, we are united — God knows how or why. Your name is on my lips often, even if I don’t pronounce it aloud.”

Hearing of Delteil’s failing health, Miller wrote to him on March 30th 1978:

“You have given so much to the world. You are a sort of living miracle...I would like to say how much you have touched my life, my thoughts, and my vision of man and of the world. But words fail me...I will venerate you

and adore you always, in this world and the next.”

Henry Miller learned of Joseph Delteil’s death from an unidentified friend in Martinique (probably Jean Fanchette).

He wrote to Caroline Delteil, on April 27th 1978:

“Do not mourn Joseph’s death. His spirit is alive within me and always will be. Many people will miss him...He was a man of both the past and the future — like King Arthur...Death is part of life. I don’t count on remaining long in this world. I am not afraid to die.”

Henry Miller died at his home, on June 7th 1980. His ashes were scattered off the coast, at Big Sur.

FINIS

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HENRY MILLER
JOSEPH DELTEIL

**CORRESPONDANCE
PRIVÉE**

1935-1978

présentée par F. J. TEMPLE

